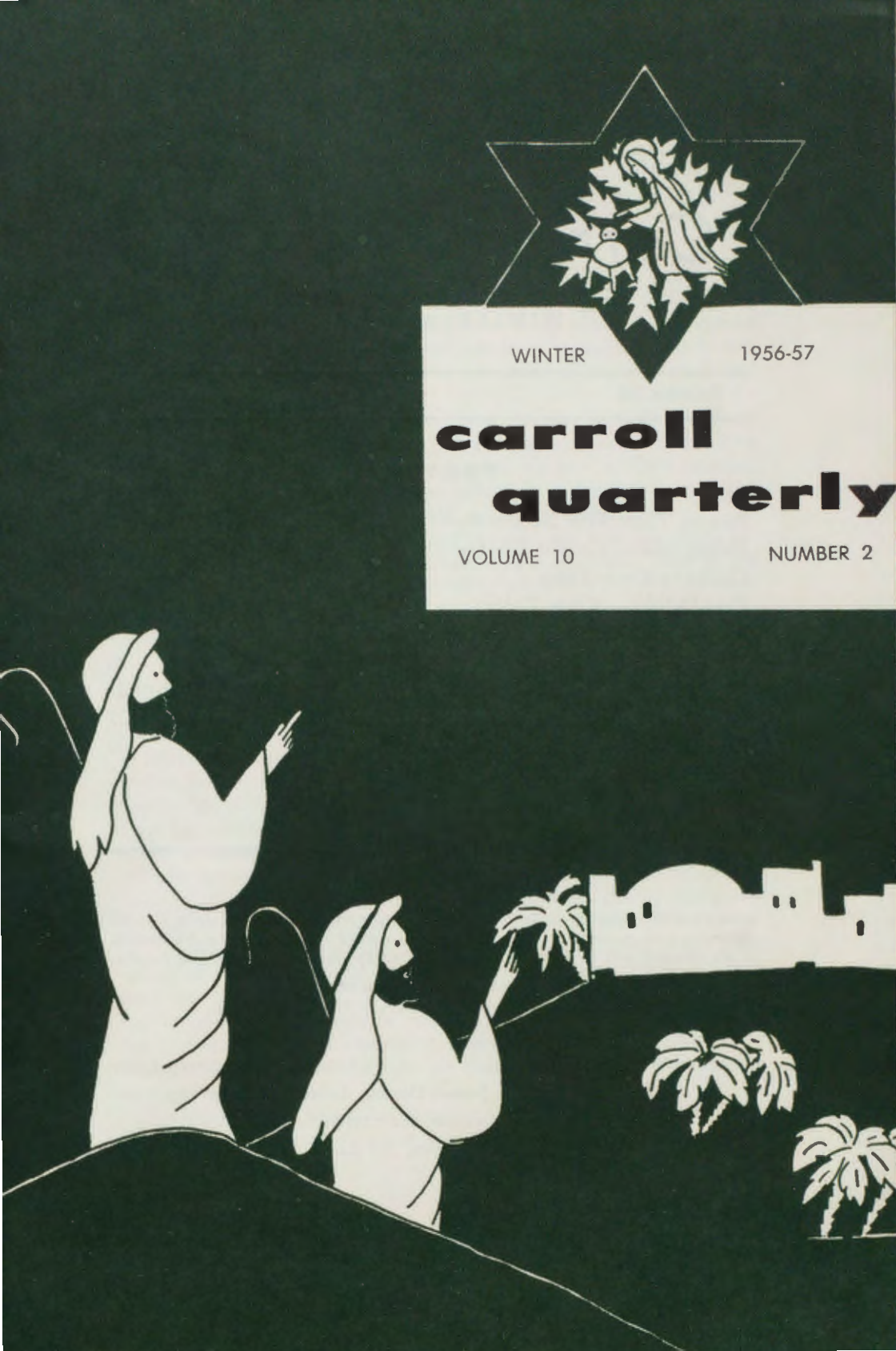
Winter 1956

The Carroll Quarterly, vol. 10, no. 2

John Carroll University



WINTER 1956-57

carroll quarterly

VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2

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The Carroll Quarterly *is published by an undergraduate staff at John Carroll University to encourage literary expression among students of the University. Consideration will be given articles submitted by students, alumni, and faculty.*

Editorial and publication offices:
John Carroll University, University Heights 18, Ohio

Because There Was No Room

by John D. McBride

HOOF-BEATS struck the brick of the back courtyard like so many iron hammers on a plated shield or so many spears dashed against the town monument, summoning the people to assembly. Two horses, foamy with sweat, swept through the crumbling arch and were reined to a stop by their masters.

Aaron came out of a small rear door, slowly, very slowly. These Romans, he thought, these coarse servants of a foreign master, how long must we suffer them, how long must we bow to their crimson-robed backs, how long must we pay tribute to build their statues and their monuments, to pave their roads, to finance their wars!

"And how long must we quarter them in our inns for nothing?" This last bit of hatred, a soft but vehement mutter, was flung in the general direction of the swarthy, scowling soldiers. They did not hear.

And of course they should not hear. Aaron was a prudent man; he would not endanger his person, his family, and his means of livelihood. He had fought through the poverty of twenty hunger-scarred years to gain possession of his inn. He had married and raised a brunette, dark-eyed girl-child. Where would she be if he were cast into chains? And what of her dear mother, her poor mother, who was turning even now in fearful pain on her scant straw pallet because the lump on her breast, at first but the size of a denarius, was growing? No, now was not the time to rebuke these Roman devils — now was not the time to be cut from his family when they so needed him. Aaron would be prudent, Aaron would be silent, but Aaron still could hate!

He loosened the frothy leather from the heads of the horses and led them to the stable. Silently he rubbed the animals' pulsing limbs and brought them fresh hay. Then he turned and went back to the house.

It was dark inside, and damp. His worried breath made little spirals of vapor against the hard stone of the vestibule. Inside he could hear the voices of the soldiers, could hear them struggling with the last logs of wood. There would be warmth for them, he thought, but none for dark-eyed Ruth and none for Miriam, poor Miriam, who struggled underneath her meager cloth on her pain-wracked pallet against that sword of agonizing pain.

Then suddenly he felt his daughter against him — she wrapped her thin, child arms around his waist and sobbed into his tunic.

"Father, father what will happen to her? They are taking the last wood. How will she stay warm — how will she stay alive if they take the last wood? Stop them, father — stop them!"

Aaron said nothing.

"But father — I held her hand — it was so cold like the waters of an icy spring, it was so cold — she does not say anything — oh father, she will die — she will die! —"

Passionately Aaron pressed his daughter to his breast. He tried to soothe her. He told her he was powerless against the conquerors of their people. But Ruth could not be consoled. She tore herself from him and fled into the cold stillness, fled to cry out her sorrow to the star-smeared skies and the listening hills.

Aaron stood and watched her, cursing himself for not being the man his daughter begged him to be, for not rebuking the Romans, for not demanding at least a share of the wood so that he might heat the bedroom of his wife. Half-determined, he turned towards the room of the Romans. Let them abuse me, let them imprison me, he thought; she will at least not die through my cowardice; and may the almighty God of Hosts, God of a Thousand Powers, protect me!

He took a step closer to the room. Through the partially open door he saw the bronze gleam in the firelight, saw the ruddy owners of the bronze, saw the sharpened swords and ready spears. He stopped and turned away. It would be useless to plead against such men, especially such armed men.

For Aaron was prudent. Somehow Miriam would live — but it was sure death to accost the Romans. He thought and he acted for today — let tomorrow look to itself.

He moved to the back regions of the house, the living quarters of his family. He crept into the bare, unadorned bedroom. Except for the silver light of one unusually great star, he was alone with Miriam. She is sleeping quietly now, praise God, thought Aaron. Or was she? In worried haste he put his head to her bosom. The faint flicker of life still burned. He rejoiced and blessed his God. He prayed.

"God of my fathers, God of all that is and was, save my poor wife! Deliver her from this pestilence, as You delivered the children of Israel from the Egyptian host, as You delivered Isaac from the knife of Abraham, as You delivered Lot from Sodom's death. With your awesome hand strike new life into her! My God, I ask, I implore You by the tablets of the temple, by the sacred Ark of the Covenant itself — save her! If You do this I will offer to You each year, as long as the blood-tides rise and fall in these veins — as long as the spirit of life drives on these limbs, an unblemished white lamb and a yearling calf. I will offer

even as he whose name I bear offered. My God grant it! Send me a sign, I beg You, that You have heard me and will send a cure!"

Torn with emotion, Aaron fell on the neck of his wife, his tears mingled with her damp hair. No one but the exceptionally bright star saw him.

It was at that moment that he heard the knock — a soft knock on the back door, and a very tired knock, as if this were not the first door against which those knuckles had been pressed. He got up and opened it.

Two minutes later it was shut. He turned, and he faced the inquiring eyes of Ruth, returning from the night.

"Who was it, Father?"

"Just a poor young couple. He was on foot and she upon a donkey — and she was with child. It looked as if her time had almost come. I told them there was no room at this inn. Imagine, disturbing everybody and everything with a squawling babe and the trouble of birth. I told them to try another place. I have troubles enough of my own. I need not seek those of others.

"But run Ruth, see how it is with your dear mother!"

A moment and she was back. The grief in her anguished eyes spoke with a thousand tongues.

". . . there was no room at the inn."

FIRST PLACE STORY

Falling Idol

by Thomas Bracken

"IF that's the real Santa Claus in the department store, who's this on the street corner?" The little boy tugged at his father's coat sleeve and pointed to the other Santa.

"That's . . . just one of Santa's helpers, Butchie."

"Then is the real one in the department store?"

"Yes."

"Arthur said his mom took him to see Santa Claus when they were in Columbus. Was that one of the helpers, too?"

"I imagine."

"Arthur says it was really Santa Claus. He says he asked him and he said he really was."

"Well, maybe so. Santa's awfully busy nowadays. He has to talk to all the little kids."

"Then why does he have helpers?"

"Helpers? Why, I suppose to help him. Here comes our bus."

They boarded the bus and took seats. Butchie sat silent for a few minutes, then said, "With what?"

"With what 'what,' sweetheart?"

"What do they help him with? Santa Claus. His helpers."

"Oh. Why, they paint the toys, and keep the records of all the kids, and take care of the reindeer."

Butchie said nothing for the rest of the ride. When they arrived home, he excused himself to visit Arthur. After he left, his father went into the kitchen. "Phyllis, I think Butchie's wise to this Santa Claus business."

"What makes you think so?" His wife took off her mitten pot-holders and lit a cigarette. "Did he say something while you were downtown?"

"He saw Santa Clauses all over the place. You know those Salvation Army guys, or whatever they are, on the street corners? I told him they were Santa's helpers, but then he started talking about Arthur going to see Santa in Columbus, and how could Santa Claus be in both places, and what do the helpers do . . . he was trying to pin me down on the whole deal. He's over at Arthur's now. I think they're comparing notes."

"Well, everybody learns sooner or later. He's nine. I guess that's

about par for the course."

"Even so, it takes a lot out of Christmas once they know. Butchie will feel awfully bad when he finds out it's a hoax. I know I did. Seems a shame . . ."

"Well, if they feel so bad, why is Butchie in such a hurry to know?"

"I guess to reassure himself. Didn't you feel awfully bad when you found out?"

"I don't remember. I suppose I did. But I would think that if he wanted to keep on believing, he wouldn't ask you all those questions."

"Now don't you start on me. How do I know why? Maybe he just wants to know definitely. I hate to tell him. I won't if I can help it."

"What will you tell him?"

"I'll just have to wait till he comes back from Arthur's. He'll probably have another batch of questions for me. What kind of a guy is this Arthur, anyway? Pretty mean kid?"

When Butchie returned an hour later, he was smiling. He didn't say anything for a while, just sat in front of the TV and watched the Santa Claus program. During the commercial, he walked over to his father's chair.

"Daddy, is that Santa Claus on the television or one of his helpers?"

"I wasn't watching."

"The guy on television. Was that Santa Claus?"

"I suppose so." His father gave him a blank stare and went back to his paper.

"Well, he said he keeps a record of all the kids. I thought his helpers did."

"That's probably what he meant."

"It didn't sound like it to me." Butchie went back to the TV.

At dinner, Butchie remained silent while his parents talked. Then, during dessert, he asked, "How does Santa Claus fit in the chimney?"

His mother took the bait, and with it the hook. She stared for a second at Butchie, then at his father, then at the pudding. "He takes a big breath, I guess," she chuckled. Then the hook came out. "Well, I don't know, Butchie. How does he fit, Ken?"

"How? Just like your mother says. He takes a deep breath and makes himself thin."

"Why doesn't he use the door like most people? Like all people?"

"Because they're locked."

"Arthur doesn't have a chimney. He lives in an apartment."

"Well, I suppose his parents leave the door unlocked." Butchie's father took a large mouthful of pudding.

"Why don't we, then?"

Butchie's father indicated his full mouth, then motioned toward his wife. She answered very quickly, "Because we have a chimney. Santa Claus uses chimneys when he can, because he parks his sled on the roof."

"What if it doesn't snow?" His father still hadn't swallowed, and again lateraled to his wife. She frowned momentarily at him and returned to Butchie.

"He doesn't need snow. Lots of kids don't have snow where they live, so he must not need it."

Butchie looked at them for a moment, then took a piece of paper out of his shirt pocket, and using it as a guide, began to fire questions in Gatling-gun procession. "Where does Santa Claus get the wood for his toys if he lives up at the North Pole? How does he keep toys for all the kids in the world in his sled? How can he go all over the world in one night? How can he remember all the stuff the kids want? Why do people go Christmas shopping if Santa Claus brings the toys?"

Butchie's father finished his pudding and patted the napkin to his mouth. "Butchie, you've been over to Arthur's house. You two thought up all these questions, and think you have it all figured out. You think that two nine-year-old boys are smarter than Santa Claus, and that he has to answer to you for everything he does. Well, did it ever occur to you that Santa Claus has been around ever since children, and he's had years of experience? Did you ever think of that? And as more and more children come into the world, Santa has to figure out quicker and better ways of taking care of them. He has to get more helpers, make more toys, go more places. Nobody knows as much about kids as Santa Claus, so nobody knows just how he operates. But he gets all his work done and makes millions of kids happy, and that's what counts. We don't know very much about him, but we do know one thing for certain — he gets awfully mad at little boys who lose their faith in him."

Butchie finished his pudding in silence, then went into the living room to watch TV. "Beautifully done, Ken," murmured Butchie's mother. "That should hold him for the next ten years."

Later, as they were putting the dishes away, Butchie's mother said reflectively, "Maybe you're right, Ken. Maybe there is a Santa Claus, just like you said. I never looked at it that way."

"Oh, fiddlesticks. It was the first thing that came into my head. Just to stall him off, more or less."

"Supposing it is true, though. Think of it, what do we know about

Santa Claus? He's been around a long, long time and ought to know a lot more about kids than we do. That's the whole trouble, people always try to figure him out. That's what makes him so wonderful, that air of mystery about him, like elves and fairies and angels."

"Now come off it, Phyllis. There's no more Santa Claus than there's a man in the moon. It's stupid, sliding down chimneys, and being in a thousand places at once, and flying reindeer, and the North Pole. The whole thing is ridiculous."

Butchie was standing in the doorway. He started to cry.

FIRST PLACE POEM

Chalice

Warrior world, hold a moment
From the busy hew and hack;
Let the blood run dry.
There will be, God knows, time enough
To begin anew.

Look you here — ah! — not for long
At chaliced blood to flood
The earth — first blood drawn.
Now begin! Here hurl your sword,
At this cradled child.

— *Kevin Tobin*

HONORABLE MENTION

Two Dollars

by Kevin Tobin

THE ten-year-old boy stood sullenly in the slush that had accumulated along the building's edge, staring into the cheerfully decorated window of a tobacco shop. Over his head two black loudspeakers hurled out Christmas carols in screaming distortion. At the corner of the street a haggard figure, dressed for the last time in bright red, rang the annual bell of charity. People rushed desperately along past the boy, packages piled high in their arms. Some laughed, some seemed stoical, some appeared depressed and weary, but none looked more the victim of life's cruel thrusts than the morose ten-year-old before the cheerful window.

Above the sidewalk's few inches of dark slush jutted his two black rubber boots. Corduroy pants, a mackinaw, head and fur-trimmed hat completed the pyramid of juvenile misery. He was an ordinary young lad, but at this moment his face was dignified with the inner sentiments of a Hungarian rebel. Unjust oppression had been placed on his shoulders, but the day of revolt was already contemplated. Uncle Ed would get just what he deserved.

Uncle Ed was not only a pretty unpleasant sort of character, but he was, even worse, a cheapskate. The boy could remember only twice that he had ever gotten so much as a nickel from the mean-faced old so-and-so. Now he was sent out to spend his last two bucks on a character like that. His last two bucks! Just why women, especially mothers, had to count how many presents a guy put under the tree was a mystery.

If there had been a way to spend the two bucks on his Uncle Ed and still not give the character a present he would have done so. But an even more interesting idea had occurred to him. He'd looked in every store window along the street until he found the thing he wanted.

In the tobacco shop window, far in a corner, stood one of those pipes with the long rubber hose that the Turks always smoked in the movies. It was all yellow and green and about the ugliest thing he had ever seen. His little heart had leaped with joy of inspiration when he first saw the Turkish pipe. Oh, Uncle Ed would *hate* it! The boy had leaned on the window frame for support at his merriment over Uncle Ed's reaction to this gift. He could see old leather-face trying to fake

how pleased he was. Then the boy's fancy had carried him to a picture of old Uncle Ed sitting squat-legged on the floor smoking that pipe like a real Turk and that had almost been too much.

The clerk in the store had put an end to all this high feeling. He announced with the tone of a judge pronouncing the death sentence that the Turkish pipe was priced at three and one-half dollars.

The beauty of what might have been still held the boy before the window of the tobacco shop. The yellow and green pipe was in there and here he was with his head whirling with pictures of Uncle Ed's dismay. Savoring his frustration had gradually brought the boy to his present morose state. He clutched his two beaten bills in one hand and stared resentfully, wistfully, through the store window.

A thin, shivering gentleman of the road, wearing little else for warmth than an old suit coat with the collar turned up, had observed all this from his station beneath a nearby lamp-post. Now he approached the boy and stood beside him.

"What's the matter, kid? No money?"

The boy looked up at his questioner with an irritable expression. "Naw," he said, "I got money, two bucks."

"Well, I wouldn't suppose a fella with two bucks would look so glum. Two bucks is a lot of money, kid."

"Not when something you want costs three and a half bucks it ain't."

"Now what do you want that costs three and a half?"

The boy pointed towards the terrible pipe. "That. I want that yellow and green pipe."

The man looked at the Turkish pipe for quite a while. Then he turned back to the boy. "Look, kid, I hate to see you miss out on a good deal like that. That sure is a beautiful pipe. Bound to make your old man real happy."

The scorn that this remark aroused in the boy was too profound to be expressed. He did not even look up. This guy was some character. Uncle Ed was peanuts to this guy.

"Look, kid. You know these stores. They'll take a young kid for everything he's got every time. They could sell that pipe for two bucks any day and still make plenty." The emptiness of his pockets spurred him on. "Look," he continued, "I got an idea. You let me take your two bucks in there and I'll get that pipe for you. I'll see that that crook gives a fair price on it. They respect a grown-up, you know. They won't try to pull a fast one on me like they do on a kid like you."

The boy was interested. It sounded logical enough. At ten the

omnipotence of the adult is still accepted. He looked up at the poorly-dressed man beside him. Then, suspicion alone making him hesitate, he demanded: "How do I know you won't just take my two bucks and keep it?"

The man smiled. "Look, kid. I don't need your two bucks. I'm just trying to do you a favor, is all. If you don't want to trust me you just won't get the pipe. As a matter of fact, I guess I had better get going . . ."

"No! No, I trust you." Pictures of Uncle Ed in fawning pretense had flashed across the boy's mind. "Here. Here's the two bucks." He held out his money to the man with the suit coat.

A third voice entered the little drama before the tobacco store window. It was a heavy voice, and it was weighted with authority. "You wouldn't really want to take the boy's two dollars, now would you?" The two, boy and man, turned to view the blue uniform and stern face of a policeman. The boy withdrew his two dollars.

"Oh, no, no, officer . . . I was just trying to help the kid out. I was going to see if I could get him a bargain here in the store. He asked me, didn't you, kid?"

"Never mind dragging the kid in on your lies, rummy. I've seen plenty of your kind. You'd think on Christmas Eve of all times you'd lay off. And especially picking on a kid who's probably trying to buy some little thing for his old man. If I didn't know the jail was warm tonight I'd run you in. Now get moving!"

The man in the suit coat started off immediately, moving as rapidly as he could in the slippery slush, his face molded with fear and anger. As he disappeared into the crowd pouring from a closing department store, a priest walked up to the policeman and the ten-year-old.

"Hello, officer. Is the boy here in some sort of trouble?"

"Ah, good evening, Father. No, the boy's all right. But that bum you might have seen running off there almost conned his last two bucks out of the poor trusting kid."

"He was going to get me a three and a half dollar pipe for it," said the boy, pouting a little at what he still felt to be an unwelcome interference by a cop."

"No, sonny," said the policeman, bending down to the boy. "He wasn't going to help you at all. As soon as he got your two dollars in his hands he would have pushed you down and run like a jackrabbit. He was going to steal it from you."

The boy remained quiet after this. The presence of the Roman collar and the police badge awed him a little. He looked down at his shin-

ing boots, splattered with slush.

As the policeman straightened up he was greeted by a smile and a wink from the priest. "Well, officer, I imagine there are more ways than one to make up a dollar and a half deficit, aren't there?"

Yes indeed, Father, there are." From his pockets the priest produced a dollar bill. The policeman rummaged up three quarters, gave one to the priest, and pressed the other two into the boy's hand. "Here, sonny. You go buy your father his present, and never again talk with strangers when you're out alone, now will you?"

"No, sir."

"Here, son," said the priest, holding out the quarter. "You can pay the tax with this." The boy accepted all these donations with joy. The priest and the policeman could see that his mind was alive with anticipation. Both felt the warm glow that comes to those who freely give pleasure to inferiors. The boy raced into the store and began to talk excitedly to the clerk, laying out his three dollar bills and three quarters. He came just to the level of the counter. It was a pleasant sight for the two men.

The priest felt that his eyes were growing moist. He clapped his hand on the policeman's shoulder in the camaraderie of the moment, of two Christians on Christmas Eve. "Merry Christmas, officer. May God bless you."

"Merry Christmas, Father, and the same to you." The two parted. The priest continued up the street toward his church. There were some gold candelabra to be polished before Midnight Mass. The policeman began to pace his beat again. As he walked he warmed himself with the thought of tomorrow's gay Christmas meal. When the boy came out of the tobacco shop a few minutes later he was carrying a gaily-wrapped package. Without looking for his two benefactors — without thinking of them, his little mind was so merrily active — he ran up the street toward home and the Christmas tree, splashing the people he passed with the slap of his boots.

The crowds of packaged pedestrians had lessened a great deal. Many of the stores had closed up and the street seemed darker. On the corner the lean Santa gave an occasional shake to his bell and thought of quitting time. The carols continued to blare from the two loudspeakers over the tobacco shop window. Their music could be heard for a great distance, even along the residential streets that ran off the business district. Distance softened the notes into harmony.

The man in the tattered suit coat with the collar turned up walked slowly along a side street. The scene was everything a man could ask of Christmas Eve. New snow fell quietly down through the oval light

of the lamp-posts, or settled on windowsills to reflect the colors of a Christmas tree within, or cloaked with white the bowing tree branches. Over it all floated the distant but clear Christmas music. The man in the suitcoat plunged his hands deeper in his pockets. At this distance the carols sounded, even to him, almost beautiful.

Song

Hark! The silver, singing spruces
Wake the poised and pregnant night,
And the cloud that snowflakes loose
Pauses, pensive in its flight.

Hark! The blue-green, white-crowned brush
And the soft, quick, breathing things
Resound a flaxen, flowing rush
While the whirling water sings.

Even gnarled and wrinkled branches,
Cleansed by purifying snow,
Move in slow and reverent dances
Casting shadows here below.

Furry creatures start to gather;
Parents nudge awake their young.
Up. lads, up; drive flanks to lather
For the greatest song is sung.

Hush! The time is through for crying.
Lo, the news has spread afar.
Lo, the wind has reached out sighing,
"Place your hopes upon the Star."

Place your hoping, groping glances,
Place your plans and dreams so wild
On the shining light that dances
From the eyes of a newborn Child.

In a solitary station,
In amidst the cows and hay,
God has wrought an Incarnation;
God has sent His Son today.

Does the Infant God-Man grimace?
Who's to blame a passing tear?
For He sees each sinner's malice;
Blackened marks upon the years.

God has blessed us with a Saviour;
Christ is born this wond'rous night,
To expiate for our behavior,
To help who falters in the fight.

The time is here for joyous singing.
Hush, my child, no need to cry.
Let us set the ages ringing.
Christ is born tonight — to die.

— *Kevin J. Sroub*

Gift

by John H. Bruening

SNOW, whole infinitudes of snow; snow to the left, white dew settled on the roofs of the tenements; snow on the trees to the right, the black giants of dead wood shampooing their hair in preparation for the coming of the green strands of spring leaves. The houses down the road reached up like mountains, ice-peaked and high, sparkling through the darkening night. Fuzzy flakes were caught in the whistles of the wind, like notes on a musical score, and danced downward in a light and joyful rhythm. The lampposts flickered hazily, undulating in the mist; glowing brilliantly, only to dim again. As silent as the night approaching, the flakes of cotton were released from the great steam shovel of sky as its ashen jaws opened wide. There was no moon nor stars up in the sky; no diadem to crown the mystic scene.

Above one of the taverns on Hubbel Street, in the heart of the big city's low-class residential section, a light burned in the window. A little boy of six sat at the window, his large, wondrous eyes gazing out at the merry flakes. The light fell upon his tawny curls, giving them a golden sheen. His eyes glittered blue, an ethereal blue, like sapphires on a silver sea. He was a little pale, yet his color gave depth to his lustrous, shiny lips and his small ivory teeth. Sandy Saunders was a beautiful child.

He was dressed in his blue suit, seated on a hard stool, looking dreamily at the snow on the outside sill. His first-grade reader was opened on the little desk beside the stool. He loved to read, to form the syllables with his lips and tongue. He wanted to read for a very special purpose. In the parlor of the house, collecting dust in a cabinet, was a book he wished to know by heart. It was the Bible. His mother used to read the passages to him not so long ago. But now she read no longer. She was dead. Often the little boy would recall to his vivid imagination the picture of his mother on her death-bed, her face so pallid, her eyes so red and sad. Constantly her last words came back to him. "Love God, my son, love Him dearly."

The flakes swam before him as tears floated to his eyes. He turned from the window and opened the top drawer of his little bureau, bringing out his prayer-book, a worn, battered missal, that had seen much use in his tiny hands. He did not know the words, but he loved to look at the pictures, especially the one where Our Lord blessed the little chil-

dren. The boy on God's knee looked like Sandy himself. How he wanted to be that boy, to sit upon the knee of God! He opened the book to that exact page and gazed at the picture. Beneath it was inscribed, "God, I love You," which Sandy had written in a scribbly hand with his mother's assistance. At Mass when the priest elevated the Sacred Host, Sandy said those words with all the love and reverence in his heart.

Somewhere from the distant night a church bell struck the hour of eight. Sandy hurriedly put his book back into the drawer and opened his closet door. On the floor lay a small box, so carefully wrapped, tied in a great yellow bow. He took it up and brought it over to his desk, looking at it with the fondest delight. It was his gift to his father; and no greater gift could he give.

From the outside came the voices of carolers, a group of social workers connected with the Salvation Army, walking among the bums and drunkards of skid-row, bringing the message of God even to the lowliest form of human society. Loudly did they sing, their hearts inflamed with the ardent passion of zeal.

> "Joy to the world, the Lord has come —
> Let Earth receive her King."

Sandy opened the window and stuck his head out, a few cold flakes falling on his curls. He was absorbed with the majestic serenity of the scene so often filled with wickedness and misery. The snow, the song, the crisp night air, everything was beautiful. The whole world was beautiful!

> "Oh, Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining;
> It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
> Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
> Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth."

Sandy silently joined in.

On they sang as they moved along the deserted ways of the streets, oblivious to the slush beneath their feet. They did not notice the scowling eyes of the workingmen who were coming home from the bar. There was only joy in their hearts. But soon they went around a corner and their happy, truly happy voices vanished with them. Sandy stood for a few moments in silence, his wandering eyes surveying the whole view. He looked up Hubbel Street, up toward the saloons and noisy taverns, up to the hell of the city, where sin did dwell, open sin. He tore his head away and looked down the street. More taverns and saloons, mingling with movie theaters and burlesque shows, loomed like specters of Satan in the night. He withdrew from his position, shutting the window.

Christmas was made for children. Was not God a child on the first

Christmas? In their innocence, they alone can capture the true spirit of wonderment, of joy, of love, of all the things that Christmas holds. They are the thinkers of the age, the marvellers of goodness, the innocent, the undoubting, the faithful, the unselfish lovers. Centuries pass in progress, but youth goes on unchanged. Innocent in days of old and innocent even still. To them alone are the years that are forever.

Sandy Saunders again looked at his gift that he would soon give to his father. What a wonderful gift it was! He wondered when his father was going to come home.

* * *

Chilling was the dank winter that invaded the town on the night before Christmas. The Great, White god brought forth its crystalline sands of cold with the loud trumpetings of the winds. The field of battle was strewn with the wintry petals of snow, snow that was fighting a losing war beneath the feet of busy people and the whining wheels of numerous cars. Man brought out his secret weapon, the powerful snow-shovel, and began flinging the aggressors back to the gutter, where they were absorbed by the half-caste and lowly slush. Enraged by such foul means, winter sent another volley, covering the sidewalks and driveways again, making man's efforts futile. At last, man conceded and retreated to the warmth of his asylum, and winter, in its fullest splendor, passed on to gain another victory elsewhere.

Through the rows of pawnshops and taverns that clung desperately together for support, John Saunders walked, unconcerned about the battle raging everywhere around him. Across the street, boisterous laughter came from a saloon. He went across the slushy road and peered through the window, disappointedly putting his hands into empty pockets. The cold blast of wind pierced his skin like countless needles of invisible and mischievous elves. The saloon afforded shelter from the roaring elements, warmth from the cold, and the companionship all mankind so desires. Big, husky men chatted noisily in a corner, pounding their tables, claiming their superiority and independency in vain elocutions. Little, scrawny weeds of mankind lined the stools like store manikins, men dejected and rejected, fatalists, lacking the strength to put up with this so exacting reality in which they found themselves. They sought an escape, but found no solace in their beer mugs. And others, like John Saunders, came to drink and to talk, to give sympathy and take it, to hear and to tell, to smile and frown, to give vent to the emotions that this modern age of speed is prone to store within a man's breast. And though life stirred behind the glass window, the saloon seemed listless, artificial, as if the people inside were dummies without feelings.

Again he searched his pocket for a coin. But none was there. In-

stead, he withdrew a crumpled envelope which contained a card. He smiled thankfully. His son would appreciate a spiritual bouquet as well as anything else. Sandy was somehow different.

Different? Was he different from other children? Are not all children somehow different? There was some quality, some intangible quality, so furtively expressed within that child's eyes.

Did a more perfect form of love set Sandy and other children above all other things? Is that the elusive sparkling in his eyes? At one time John Saunders thought it was; but as he walked slowly along Hubbel Street on the most hallowed eve of the year, his cold hands stuffed into the pockets of his trousers, he began to doubt.

Along Hubbel Street stood the castles of the poor, tall, crumbling buildings, breeding filth and desolation. In the mist of the snowy night, they tottered as if drunk with the wine they contained. The poor led a hapless existence, one wrought with every conceivable vice. Back rooms of prostitution, dark alleys where sinister rendezvous are kept, gambling holes filled with foul smoke, all tucked away under the cloak of Christmas. Starving, bitter mankind, thrown into a den of candid sin, is lost beneath the conquering snow. There is no denying it: hell reigns in the world; hell rules the ways even of the children.

As John Saunders approached a corner, he noticed a shivering Santa Claus standing beside a lamppost, holding a tin cup in his hand. He was scowling beneath his whitened beard. A passer-by dropped a coin into the cup and received a dry, unappreciative "Thank you."

"Good will towards men," John Saunders mumbled to himself.

The neon lights flashed on and off, beacons for sin, signals for drunks and tramps. Yet not only on skid-row did this animalism exist. The middle class hypocrites, envious of the rich and snobbish to the poor, in their mad obsession to live beyond their means, throw prudence and justice to the angry winter winds, and fall victim to that monstrous demon, Pride. A new television set, a new home, a new car, a better job, all are more important than religion. The middle class must hold its own against the rich and poor alike, calumniating the first and forcing the latter into their inferior social position. Charity on Christmas? It is not so!

The thoughts of John Saunders went on to the higher class of society. Sin was there covered over by a law of etiquette, an etiquette which had replaced ethics. To the rich belonged the most ridiculous hypocrisy of all. "Thank God that I am not like other men!" How like a cancer does sin lay hold of the soul and spread, and devour the goodness there. Open sin, hidden sin, the background and the foreground of life, the four darkened horizons! Yet was there not a sun above it all, a sun of

goodness, that beamed with love?

Signs on the burlesque show which Saunders passed depicted the dancers in their suggestive minimum of clothing, like idols of Babylon, to be worshipped by a weak and straying mankind. How many children had passed this way and gazed upon the pictures, their curiosity arising? Lurid magazines, allowed to remain on the market by those who consider themselves good Christians, jutted out of their racks for all to see, even the innocent eyes of children. Newspapers flood their front pages with morbid details of heinous crimes, allowed to be printed, allowed to entice others to follow the examples contained therein, allowed by our freedom of press, a freedom enslaved by the mandates of Satan. And still the hypocritic editors blast away at juvenile delinquency. The philosophers of the times cry to the heavens, "We cannot live under the dictates of a God in this modern age! We must be free to do what we please!" Indeed it was a Sodom or a Gomorrah!

And whom would one find that was good? Would it be ten, as Abraham thought? Or would it be three, three lone holy souls as in the days of old? Surely in the great metropolis there were more than three that truly loved their God.

John Saunders crumpled his envelope into a ball and threw it to the gutter.

It was Christmas Eve. A corner telephone pole had a picture of a smiling Santa Claus tacked to it. Old Father Christmas had his usual green bag, overflowing with various toys. Santa had replaced the Christ Child. There was no denying that. Santa Claus had stepped in with his whiskers and eight reindeer and sent the Babe of the Manger into the background, as if Santa were greater than God. It is more important to please a mythical maker of joy than the God of All Joy and All Goodness. A corrupt society, hypocritical, rationalizing, brandishes the banners of a materialistic age and roars above the quiet voices of angels that sing of peace and good-will-toward-men.

He tried to deny the fact. "The world is good," he repeated to himself. But his words were empty in the cold night air, and no echo dared to answer back.

The wind bit his ears.

Sodom sprang all around him. He had but to open his eyes, or cock his ear, and a godless age was evident. An artificial charity had been built in ashes and dung; the whitewashed sepulchres still gleamed in the immaculate snow. One need not look far for hell.

John Saunders stopped in front of the side door of a tavern. A light burned in the window overhead. He put his hand on the knob, but hesitated to open it, as if frozen by the coldness of the air, and the coldness

of his reflections.

He thought of his son who was awaiting him upstairs. What had he to give his son? Should he leave the envelope in the gutter where it lay? He turned around and walked back to the front.

A neighbor came out of the tavern and wished him the season's greetings. He mumbled back and began retracing his steps along the curb, a harsh wind howling wildly upon him. He found the envelope where he had thrown it, wet by the snow, seemingly meaningless. He picked it up, knocked the snow off, and glanced at the smeared inscription. "To My Son" it read. He turned around and started back home.

"Sandy just might like it," he thought to himself, doubtfully. "But a kid needs more than this. He needs guns, toys, things like that. You can't make a kid happy with a card."

But nevertheless, he slipped it back into his pocket. It was, after all, better than nothing.

The snow was beginning to stop falling. John Saunders slowly walked along the sidewalk, his head sunk low.

Commercial god, social god, scientific god, material god, the world made a religion even more polytheistic than the Roman pagans. There was no denying that. The truth of it was all too obvious. "Merry Christmas" was a mockery. Church, school, home, community, society itself cared nothing for God. As the snow made the shrubbery apparent, so too must Christmas make charity and faith, already there, apparent. But in all the city, who was there to be found that knew that secret of Christmas?

Somewhere in the far-flung night a child stood before a tree, his wondrous eyes reflecting the colored lights as he smiled wistfully at the presents beneath the tree. And in the same room, a manger scene lay neglected in the corner. Somewhere merry souls chanted a joyful carol, their voices dead and heavy, with words too long familiar. And somewhere greedy misers counted their holiday gains, the tinkling of the coins drowning out the music from the church. The eve of Christmas was just another day camouflaged by a farcial gaiety.

John Saunders opened the door of his home and looked up the wooden stairs. A ray of light squeezed under the top door and fell upon the landing. Hunched over and holding the railing, John Saunders ascended.

"Is there really a God?" he thought to himself.

The whole world could go to hell and John Saunders would not care; so great was his despondency.

He opened the front door of his apartment.

Sandy Saunders stood in the bedroom archway, his young features

radiating an ineffable warmth. There was enchantment in the youngster's eyes and smile.

"Hello, son," the father said, closing the door. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas," the son replied, moving forward.

John Saunders hung up his jacket and went over to the radiator.

After taking the chill from his bones, he went over to the side window and gazed out into the night that was quickly bringing a fog in with the snow. He opened the window a few inches and breathed deeply. Even the air savored of the dirt of the town.

"Bring my jacket to me," he said, remembering the card.

Sandy backed to the jacket, and, holding one hand behind him throughout the mission, gave the jacket to his father.

"Here's your present son," he said, withdrawing the crumpled paper.

Sandy looked down at it.

The father felt the pain of disappointment that was bound to appear soon within his sweet son's eyes.

"I got a present for you," Sandy said, beaming, bringing his precious gift from behind his back.

"For me?" the father said, raising heavy brows. He took the package and smiled at the yellow bow, so carefully wrapped by his son's little hands.

"It isn't much," the youngster said, "but it's all I can afford."

John Saunders untied the bow.

The gleam in the youngster's eyes danced merrily. Sandy was far more happy giving than he ever could be receiving. Sandy was indeed different.

John Saunders opened the box, only to find a scrap of paper, a small scrap of paper which bore a tiny fingerprint on one of the uneven folds. He took it out, frowning.

Sandy waited anxiously.

Shivering from the cold air coming in through the window, the father opened the small scrap of paper.

"Daddy, I love you," it read.

"Oh Sandy," he cried, falling to his knees, tears flooding to his eyes. He grasped the child to him.

The note had fallen to the window sill and was blown out by the chaotic wind. It twisted and turned on its flight to the ground, like a great snowflake, omen of the message it contained.

It went unnoticed beneath the feet of passers-by, too busy, in too great a hurry to care.

Yet Sodom was spared.

The Mother

by Lawrence Raybourne

I MET her on Christmas Eve — the mother. It was after my discharge from the Marines, the year before the signing of the Korean Peace Treaty. Since then, I have thought that God must have intended for me to find her at the time when I needed her most. Maybe it was because I wanted nothing less than a miracle that I failed to recognize how miraculous the circumstances of that night really were.

I remember her as she stood beneath the hazy, ineffective glow shed by the arched streetlamp. Flurries of icy insects, seemingly lured by the light-globe, fluttered around her and melted onto the warm, dark pavement. Silhouetted there, she looked like an apparition poised between this world and another. It seemed to me as though the aura which encircled her emanated from within. One minute, I was alone; the next, she was standing just a few doors away.

She wore a loose-fitting blue coat with a hood. A white scarf haloed the wholesome face. She wasn't watching the colorful wreaths in the store windows or the tinsel and holly that festooned the sidewalks. Instead, she was watching me with dark eyes that reflected depths of experience and understanding.

"You're alone," she said, but her intonation implied that she meant more than my physical solitude.

"Yes," I admitted defensively. "Is there something wrong with that?"

"On Christmas Eve it's a bit unusual. Why aren't you with your family?"

Her question was so compassionate and unassuming that I found myself answering against my will.

"I don't have a family. Until tonight, I had a girl."

"I'm sorry."

"You don't understand. I broke our engagement myself." I recalled for the first time since she began talking to me, that a moment before, I had been despondent. I began feeling sorry for myself again as I thought about my war experiences with the First Marine Division in Korea.

Angelic soprano voices of carolers reached us from the remote back streets.

GOD REST YE, MERRY GENTLEMEN, LET NOTHING YOU DISMAY. REMEMBER CHRIST, OUR SAVIOUR, WAS BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY — TO SAVE US FROM SATAN'S POW'R WHEN WE WERE GONE ASTRAY.

"Oh tidings of comfort and joy," I mocked bitterly. "Is this a merry Christmas for men like me who know what's happening over there? Tree-trimming is for guys that haven't seen their buddies killed before their eyes — who, a minute before they were blown apart, talked about the girl back home just like I did. Christmas isn't for fathers who sacrifice their sons to be killed."

"There was One Father Who gave His Only Son," she said softly.

I went on, without paying attention to her. "Christmas isn't for mothers, either — who've lost sons because the world is evil and cruel."

"What is your name?" she asked, changing the subject momentarily.

"John Peterson," I replied, surprised. "What's yours?"

"You can call me Mary. And what is *her* name?"

"Whose? You mean — Virginia."

"She waited for you to come back, didn't she? She must love you. God was good to bring you back."

"My skin was spared, if that's what you mean. What about all the

boys that are dead?"

"But you're among the living, John. Make your life with Virginia if you love her."

"Can't you understand?" I shouted and it rang through the streets which, turning colder, were now snow-blanketed. "If we got married, she'd want children."

"Of course," she agreed kindly. "A normal woman *wants* to have children."

"But if we did — how many of our boys might go to war? The age we're living in isn't the most peace-assuring."

"War isn't the only hazard, and it is not a new one. We must trust in God and He'll be faithful to deliver us."

"From war?" I scoffed.

"From anything that is His will. If not from war, then from that which is more dangerous than the most devastating war — that which can hurt a man's soul.

"You're a woman," I said. "How can you know what war is like? My mother died giving birth to me. God at least spared her from the agony of wondering when she'd get a telegram saying I was dead."

"If Virginia and I had girls instead of sons, they'd be mothers someday and might know what it was to lose a son. That's why marriage is not for me. Virginia feels bad about it now, but she'll get over it. As for me, I'd rather stay single, even if I'm lonely, than get married and not have kids."

"Supposing Virginia succeeds in forgetting you and *does* marry someone else? *They'll* have children, if, as you say, she really wants them. These children might also know the tragedies of war."

"I can't help that," I said, avoiding her eyes.

"As long as they are not your own!" She turned away and I realized that she was crying.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean —"

"I must leave you now, Mr. Peterson. It's nearly midnight." She smiled sadly.

"Please."

"I must be at church. Mass is beginning. I am there at Midnight Mass every year."

"Don't leave like this," I pleaded, grabbing her coat to hold her. It unbuttoned and slipped open. I saw that she was pregnant.

I'm not sure how long I stood there transfixed or how she managed to disappear as mysteriously as she appeared, but I knew that I

needed to find her and beg her forgiveness before I would feel right again.

I looked down every street, calling her simple name over and over again. At last I realized exactly where I needed to go before I would find her.

It was not an easy decision to make; I was not a good Catholic — I had neglected the Sacraments for over a year, but once I had made up my mind what I must do, my heart was filled with the necessary grace.

St. Anne's Cathedral was filled to overflowing. As I neared, I was fearful of not finding her.

Suddenly, I saw her walking up the steps.

"Wait!" I called.

She stopped and turned. On her face was all the beauty of matured motherhood. Her expression told me she was grateful that I had come. I rushed breathlessly to her side and touched her arm — but allowed my hand to drop quickly, afraid that it might violate her sanctity.

"Wh — who are you?" I whispered awe-stricken.

"I have told you," she said. "My name is Mary — Mary Sikorski. My husband and children are waiting inside for me."

Just then, I saw Virginia going in. I wet my fingers with holy water and blessed myself, then hurrying in, I knelt beside her.

As the Mass began, I pressed her hand.

"Thank you, Mary," I breathed softly. And it was to the Mother of God I spoke.

Why Novelists Write

by Lawrence J. Minet, Ph. D.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: *In the Fall Issue of the Quarterly, Dr. Minet considered "What Is a Novel," and "Why Novels Are Written." He concludes his study with "Why Novels Are Read."*]

III. Why Novels Are Read

People must be motivated to read novels, just as novelists must to write them. The motives of readers and novelists are linked, for the fulfillment of the novelist's deepest expectations is dependent on the acceptance of his books: money, fame, the accomplishment of the reform or changes urged in his books and, most of all, the knowledge that he has revealed things which matter greatly to him, so that the reader, too, may know and perhaps understand.

It is not enough to say that novels are read for entertainment, for so are movie magazines and comic books. Why does a reader find a novel entertaining? When the reader is entertained, he is involved in what he is reading. The universal characteristic of well-written books is that they are entertaining, though never in quite the same way. A reader may find pleasure in Dorothy Sayers as well as Leo Tolstoy, but it is pleasure of a different sort. In a really great novel, the emotional and intellectual involvement of the reader becomes complete: he is overcome with a sense of discovery of unimagined meanings in life. But to say that a reader reads to be entertained tells nothing of the sources of his satisfaction in books. What is the attractive force of the novel?

To Carl Becker, reading a writer for his style was a pointless pursuit that "should cease with adolescence, except perhaps for the pseudo-literary who must be allowed to retain some sustaining illusion." [3] Certainly, no writer is read merely for his style: the circle of admirers of those writers who "say nothing, but say it so beautifully" has never been a very wide one. A great novelist says something significant and says it beautifully. Only the novelist with a feeling for style, for what one critic called "the power and the glory of words," can realize the promise of his ideas. Readers cannot help being attracted by stylistic beauty, a beauty

[3] Carl Becker, "Labeling the Historians," in *Everyman His Own Historian: Essays on History and Politics*, New York, F. S. Crofts & Co., 1935, p. 137.

never existing of itself, but always for the expression of thought. In the novel, style and content are inseparable parts of greatness.

A source of interest in a novel is the reader's identification of himself with a character existing within it. The character need not be heroic, nor extremely significant in the plan of the novel. What absorbs the reader is the illusion of the unfolding of his own life as it was, or is, or might have been. Self-identification is a motive which, curiously, novelists and their readers share together, for, in bringing his characters into being, the novelist inevitably draws on the experiences of his own life, seeking sometimes to recreate, in a fictional character, himself.

Though they have been well drawn, a reader does not always experience a sense of identity with a novelist's characters, or even a sympathetic interest in them, perhaps because they do not appeal to him as persons or because he does not like the author's philosophy of life which is expressed through them. A reader has such things in mind when he says that a book which he has read is good, but that he still does not like it. Reading is an intensely subjective act, almost as subjective as the process of writing itself. Like novelists, readers interpret books in terms of their own experiences and attitudes of mind, evolving standards of judgment which are very personal, though not always very rational.

In reading good novels, readers extract meanings from life which authors have suggested to them; through novels, they learn a great deal about life and about themselves. Hardly any of them are conscious of such a motive in their reading; they read to be "entertained," without realizing how deeply this growth in knowledge of life is part of their satisfaction in reading. But the novel is not the only source of understanding of the world. There are books in philosophy, sociology and psychology which deal with broad aspects of human existence in greater detail than the novel, and much more systematically. Why should a reader who wants to enlarge his perception of humanity choose a novel rather than a psychology text or a sociological study?

One reason is that the novel imparts information informally; its lack of scientific precision is part of its charm. A novel, of course, should be psychologically valid: in his characterization, the author's imagination ought never to become cast adrift from the realities of the world, yet the novelist should never allow his imagination to be constricted by them. A great novel portrays humanity with an intimacy and an artistic fervor, with a sense of immediacy, that no text book can match. In its shifting patterns of dialogue and description, its rich possibilities for characterization, the novel can be an intimate revelation of life, so that the reader may come to know fictional characters with a fullness of understanding that eludes him in his closest friendships. One human being's knowledge

of another is limited to his observation of the other's manner and speech and to what can be learned from speaking to those who also know him too. In any friendship, there is a mutual feeling of unsatisfied curiosity, for even friends throw up barriers of reticence about themselves. A novel satisfies curiosities and sweeps aside barriers — at least some of them. The reader can learn in novels things at which in actual life he could only guess: the ebbing tide of thought in a character's mind as he lies half-awake in bed; details of private conversations within his family and with friends; the subtle interplay of his thoughts and his words as he speaks. The novelist passes through barriers; he ranges where he will.

The greatness of the novel is its power to overreach differences of culture and of religion that divide peoples, to transcend distances of space and of time itself. Novels written two centuries ago are read today, though the societies they describe have long been swept away by ideologies and war and economic change. Brazilians read Russian novels of the nineteenth century and Spaniards read British novels of the eighteenth. Why are they read? Why is Dickens kept alive after child labor and much of the other ugliness of the Industrial Revolution against which he protested have become memories preserved in history books? The miracle of the novel is that the author, writing as the partisan of dying party or a spent cause, can, through the beauty and wisdom of his characterization, achieve universality quite without intending it: it is not as a partisan of a cause that he is remembered, but as one who has revealed something of the depth and richness of life. A great novel, suffering in translation less than poetry, is universal because it explores the emotions and problems of human beings throughout the earth who have in common, if nothing else, their humanity.

It is the irony of the novelist's art that, however earnestly he wishes to communicate thoughts and feelings through words, he can never be certain what meanings his readers will draw from them. There is an indeterminateness in all writing; literature is expressive, in a sense, as music is expressive. Words, groupings of letters, are symbols with emotional connations and subtleties of meaning that are different for everyone who reads them: *happiness, success, love* — how many mental images they evoke! When words are grouped into sentences, formed in outward lucidity, in objective clarity of fact, they contain for readers implications, evocations of meaning, unimagined by the novelist in writing them. The novelist does not create one book, but a multitude of books, for in reading, each reader interprets the novel in terms of his own involvement with life. No two human beings read quite the same book: the novel speaks uniquely to each of them. Everyone influenced by a novel enters into a private world of his own imagining. Reading is a creative experi-

ence as well as writing.

Although uncertain of the impressions which his books stir within others' minds, the novelist possesses the power to stir them greatly. A novel can refine one's perceptions and deepen one's understanding of life. Few readers read novels to be exhorted or reformed; they read in search of understanding of human beings in their complexity. The novel demands of the writer, not that he preach to humanity, but only that he try to understand it, as fully, as completely, as he can.

Requiem

Short, dark-haired men of the Western Isle,
Sole rulers of its small expanse
Were set upon by the Danann host,
And conquered by the sword and lance.

But sword and lance did not, the fray,
Alone decide. For strange magic
And mystic powers did win the day,
And not the Danann's armed might.

What mystic powers? What magic arts
That shattered breastplate, haft, and helm?
And pierced noble Firbolg hearts?
Who can, de Danann overwhelm?

Sad that day in Erin's story;
Final ending of an age.
Thus the end of Firbolg glory
Closed in blood, and battle rage.

— *John P. Browne*

Contributors

JOHN D. McBRIDE, a freshman Social Science major from Chicago, opens the Winter issue with "Because There Was No Room." This is his first Quarterly contribution.

THOMAS BRACKEN, senior Social Science major from Columbus, Ohio, is the winner of the Quarterly Christmas Contest. His "Falling Idol" was judged best in the Short Story division.

KEVIN TOBIN, editor of the 1952-53 volume of the Quarterly, takes first place in the poetry division with "Chalice," and an honorable mention in the story division with "Two Dollars." Kevin is an evening division graduate student.

KEVIN J. SROUB, a senior Natural Science major from Cleveland, presents the Christmas poem, "Song." This is Kevin's first published Quarterly work.

JOHN H. BRUENING, freshman Social Science major from Cleveland, offers "The Gift." This is his first Quarterly contribution.

LAWRENCE RAYBOURNE, an Evening Division student from Cleveland, presents "The Mother," also an initial Quarterly appearance.

LAWRENCE J. MINET, PH.D., offers the second installment of "Why Novelists Write." Dr. Minet is an assistant professor of economics in the School of Business, Economics, and Government.

JOHN P. BROWNE adds the poem "Requiem" to his long list of Quarterly contributions. John is a senior Social Science major from Cleveland.